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HOMELESSNESS IN SAN FRANCISCO

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HOMELESSNESS IN SAN FRANCISCO

SUMMARY

A seven-month study of programs designed to aid in the alleviation of problems of homeless people included interviews with representatives of city agencies, visits to sites of projects, and observation of meetings of the Mayor's Budget Task Force on HOMELESSNESS and its Continuum of Care Committee. This report describes some of the commendable programs encountered. There are recommendations on:

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Task Force: Seminars in property management should follow-up to ensure proper maintenance; violators' shed and those in noncompliance be removed from

The City government should encourage development of a vehicle by which the public may offer material assistance to homeless people without the risk of supporting substance abuse. A broad base of support and participation is essential to the success of the program. Evaluation should be an integral part of the program.

- Programs for Women and Children: Special programs must be provided for

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SUMMARY

A seven-month study of programs designed to aid in the alleviation of problems of homeless people included interviews with representatives of city agencies, visits to sites of projects, and observation of meetings of the Mayor's Budget Task Force on HOMELESSNESS and its Continuum of Care Committee. This report describes some of the commendable programs encountered. There are recommendations on:

- **The Matrix Program:** A coherent statement of goals and objectives of the Matrix Program is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Program. Costs and effectiveness of the program can be evaluated only when it is clear what the goals are.
- **Mandatory Housing:** An Advisory Council to require property management standards for contract SRO hotels should be established. Support services for tenants must be provided as part of mandatory housing.
- **Continuum of Care:** The Continuum of Care plan developed by sub-workgroups is supported. There is a recommendation that a feedback plan from the people who benefit from the plan be continually integrated.
- **Code Enforcement Task Force:** Seminars in property management should become mandatory with follow-up to ensure proper maintenance; violators' names should be published and those in noncompliance be removed from the program.
- **Voucher Program:** The City government should encourage development of a voucher program as a vehicle by which the public may offer material assistance to homeless people without the risk of supporting substance abuse. A broad base of support and participation is essential to the success of the program. Evaluation should be an integral part of the program.
- **Programs for Women and Children:** Special programs must be provided for

the particular needs of women and children.

INTRODUCTION

The 1994-95 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury embarked on a study of Homelessness in San Francisco. The multiple layers of problems which confront the people labeled as homeless and which the various agencies of the City attempt to alleviate are indeed complex. Interviews with departmental officials and program directors and homeless advocates provided much information. Visits to project sites provided first-hand data.

Some recognition of the complexity of the issues surrounding homelessness dawns with the realization that there is no simple, agreed-upon answer to the question, "How many homeless people are there in San Francisco? Statistics and estimates vary with good reason. For example, one can ascertain how many people were in shelters on a given night (even this number may be questionable because shelters may take more people than they are authorized to house). Counting the people in parks, doorways, and other almost invisible places people have found is not a simple matter. After consulting the Polaris report "Survey of Emergency Shelters for Homeless Persons in San Francisco", the Fielding Institute's "interesting Times: A Study of Housing and Homelessness", and sociologist Christopher Jenks' The Homeless it was concluded an accurate count has not been made and is not possible at present. The Continuum of Care Committee hopes that as they have more centralization of services it will be possible to have more accurate figures. It will be necessary to have an agreement among advocates, homeless people, and agency workers on the definition of homelessness and acceptance of the method to be used for a systematic count.

Observing the work of the Mayor's Budget Task Force on Homelessness and the staggering task assumed by the Continuum of Care is humbling. Meeting so many dedicated, competent people and seeing the vision of what they are developing is a privilege. The Grand Jury report is being written while the final draft of the Continuum of Care is still being assembled. Observation of this work gives depth to understanding the great effort that goes into a cooperative effort of this scope. These groundbreaking efforts deserve the most serious consideration.

During the study of myriad homeless projects one becomes aware that there is danger that working with homelessness will become a self-perpetuating activity, almost an industry in itself. This institutionalization and bureaucratization must be guarded against lest the focus on helping homeless people and eliminating homelessness is lost. This rigidification has some of the same effects seen when the public and workers in homeless projects become insensitive to the plight of homeless people and are only interested in getting the problems away from public view.

Projects and programs which were visited or studied that seem worthy of encouragement are: Mission Housing Development, Lifelink, Lifeline, Larkin Street Enterprises, San Christina Hotel, MAP (Mobile Assistance Patrol), Larkin Street Youth Center, the job development programs at St. Anthony's Foundation and the Glide Foundation.

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California. Grand Jury
(San Francisco)
Homelessness in San
Francisco /
[1995]

MATRIX PROGRAM

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

To determine if the Matrix Program is an effective way of dealing with the problems of homeless people.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Matrix Program is a central part of the Mayor's efforts to deal with the problems of homelessness in San Francisco. It is controversial. A coherent statement of purpose is needed in order for the Program to be evaluated for cost and effectiveness.

PROCEDURES

Statements of purpose, descriptions of the operations, and statistics from the Police Department, the Department of Social Services, and the Department of Public Health were studied. Interviews were held with personnel from these departments as well as homeless advocates. The U.S. Justice Department Amicus Brief to the California Supreme Court and a March 20, 1994, Resolution by the Board of Supervisors to eliminate the Program were also studied.

FINDINGS

1. The Matrix Program began in August 1993 with only police officers in the outreach vans. In October personnel from the Departments of Social Services and Public Health were added to the teams. A coherent statement of the goals and objectives of the Program does not exist for evaluation of the effectiveness of the Program.
2. Although the budget analyst for the Board of Supervisors made an

estimate of the costs of the Matrix Program in December 1993, the Mayor's Office and other sources make various conflicting estimates of the cost of the Matrix program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A coherent statement of the goals and objectives of the Matrix Program should be developed in order to measure the effectiveness of the Program.
2. An estimate of the costs of the programs should be made to determine the program's cost effectiveness.

RESPONSE REQUIRED: The Mayor's Office within sixty days.

MANDATORY HOUSING

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

In November 1994, the Mayor's Office placed on the ballot a measure designed to move homeless people out of shelters into more permanent housing. The plan is to take a portion of the monthly General Assistance check (\$245 out of \$360) and use it for a room in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The measure was approved by the voters but has not yet been implemented. At the time the measure was being drafted and considered people working on problems of housing for homeless in the Mission District were consulted. Although the Supported Housing Network opposed the mandatory housing measure, several recommendations made follow sound principles that could be used in putting mandatory housing into practice.

PROCEDURES

Site visits were made to agencies which operate programs to provide homeless

people with emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing. Actual housing sites visited included family shelters, SRO hotels, a renovated SRO hotel, an SRO hotel slated for renovation, and new units constructed as low-income housing. The most instructive written source was the **Residential Hotel Management Manual** published by the City Attorney's Code Enforcement Task Force.

FINDINGS

3. Property management standards that protect both tenant and landlord ensure the housing is decent, safe, and sanitary. The present code provides only adherence to standards required to have a license to operate a building of a certain size.
4. A program of Building Code Enforcement helps the City to ensure that the SRO hotels with which it contracts to house homeless people will be fit for habitation.
5. Support services are essential for many homeless people so that it is possible for them to be responsible tenants. Without these services tenants as well as owners cannot be assured a smooth-functioning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. An Advisory Council for the mandatory housing program should be established. This Council will develop property management standards for the SRO hotels that have contracts with the City. These basic minimum standards will ensure housing that is decent, safe, and sanitary.
4. Property Management standards for the SRO hotels should be established and enforced by a group such as the Code Enforcement Task Force (see separate section on this topic).
5. A portion of the money paid by the tenants from their General Assistance grant for housing should be used to supply support services for the tenants in the SRO hotels. Such ongoing support services are essential to assist tenants in transition from homelessness to responsible tenancy and a stable

life in permanent housing.

RESPONSE REQUIRED: The Department of Social Services in sixty days.

CONTINUUM OF CARE FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

The Continuum of Care is a comprehensive five-year plan for assisting individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The proposals developed by the Mayor's Homeless Budget Advisory Task Force offer a viable means of addressing the issues of homelessness in San Francisco.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Continuum of Care addresses the problem of homelessness in an integrated and coordinated proposal which includes housing, health care and support services to prevent and reduce homelessness. The continuum is designed to move homeless people as quickly as possible to the greater levels of responsibility and independence that permanent housing, training, and employment would provide.

PROCEDURE

The San Francisco Civil Grand Jury studied the first and evolving drafts of the CONTINUUM OF CARE: A FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC HOMELESS PLAN developed by members of the Mayor's Budget Task Force on Homelessness through its Continuum of Care Committee. Grand jurors attended meetings of the Task Force, the Continuum of Care Committee, and some work groups to observe the evolution of the plan.

FINDINGS

6. The Continuum of Care is a five-year strategy which has as its aim the alleviation of homelessness as a way of life for many people. The goal is to transform the basic causes of homelessness which center around the issues of 1) no immediate employment, 2) no affordable housing, 3) no homeless prevention as a family support system.
7. The Continuum of Care Plan places strategic emphasis on permanent solutions for alleviating homelessness. The Continuum of Care Committee, which represents various agencies (public, private, nonprofit, service providers), as well as homeless advocates, is preparing a comprehensive plan to facilitate housing placements for homeless people, including those who are being discharged from jails, hospitals, or mental health facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The Civil Grand Jury supports the urgent priority given to searching for long-term solutions to homelessness, including transitional and permanent housing, support services, health care, mental health services, and job training and placement for homeless people.
7. The Civil Grand Jury strongly recommends that the Integrated Action Plan developed by the work groups for the five-year plan be implemented. The recommendation includes the stipulation that the feedback and involvement of people who will be recipients of the Plan continue to be integrated into all steps of the Plan.

RESPONSE REQUIRED: Mayor's Office, the Mayor's Budget Task Force on Homelessness, and the Continuum of Care Committee within sixty days.

CODE ENFORCEMENT TASK FORCE'S RESIDENTIAL HOTEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

What methods have been established to ensure that community housing and hotels for low income and special needs residents are up to health and safety codes, and that the buildings are abiding by sound management practices?

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

Residential hotel property owners and operators have a very complex job in providing one of the most important resources in San Francisco -- affordable housing for low income single adults that is decent and safe. The City also has a complex responsibility in monitoring the conditions in SRO hotels in particular.

The Residential Hotel Management Manual, an interview with a representative of the code Enforcement Task Force, and an inspection of a hotel as participant observers were utilized to study plans for improved low rent housing conditions, particularly in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels.

FINDINGS

The Code Enforcement Task Force, which consists of representatives from the City Attorney's Office, Department of Public Health, Department of Social Services, Policy and Fire Departments, in collaboration with nonprofit housing organizations developed a practical plan to help property owners and operators comply with local health and safety codes.

8. The Residential Hotel Management Manual and accompanying seminars specifically deal with the effective management of both the building and the tenants. The underlying principle of the manual is to recognize that both the building and the tenants are viable "assets" -- that is central to the stabilization of properties for long term, safe and decent

housing.

9. The development of the seminar, which presently is voluntary, for the residential hotel/property owners is based on some practical advice learned from discussions with for-profit and nonprofit professional property owners and managers, building, health, and fire department inspectors, police officers, social service providers and various neighborhood advocacy groups to help overcome obstacles to successful management of the building and the tenant.
10. The main benefit of both the Manual and the Seminar as component elements of the Code Enforcement Task Force is to provide practical advice about (a) the rights and responsibilities of owners and of tenants; (b) the knowledge of applicable state and local housing health and safety codes; and, (c) the property management/respectful tenant relations tools that enable the owners to comply with the laws which will in turn lead to creating a building which is stable financially, legally, and socially.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. That participation in the one-day seminar directed at hotel property owners and operators be changed from voluntary to mandatory participation. This will ensure a more uniform and consistent dissemination of information and expectations and consequences for non-adherence to the City health and safety codes.
9. That there be ongoing training and follow-up for hotel property owners and operators to ensure proper maintenance of buildings for the tenants.
10. That there be public dissemination of names and addresses of hotels which are found to be in noncompliance or in violation of local and state housing laws. Such publication will ensure general public knowledge of sites which are in violation and that preventative steps will be taken by continuous maintenance and compliance with the law. That hotels found to be in noncompliance be removed from further participation in the **Hotel Residential Management Program**.

That the City Attorney's Code Enforcement Task Force and member agencies be commended for developing the training manual and seminar. The member agencies are Bureau of Building Inspection, City Attorney's Office, Department of City Planning, Department of Public Health, San Francisco Fire Department, San Francisco Police Department, and San Francisco District Attorney.

RESPONSE IS REQUESTED FROM: The Mayor's Office within sixty (60) days.

VOUCHERS FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

Are there alternative ways to give material aid to homeless people that will have advantages for both the donor and the receiver?

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

People who see homeless people on the street or other public places often have a desire to help in some immediate material way but may be reluctant to give money because they fear the money may be used for substances that the donor does not wish to condone.

PROCEDURES

A study of the voucher program in Berkeley operated by the Berkeley Cares organization provides a model for developing a voucher program. Interviews were held with voucher providers, businesses which redeem the vouchers, and voucher users as well as the sponsoring organization and the Chamber of Commerce. Inquiries were also made about the program (called Castro Cares) which operated in San Francisco for about a year.

FINDINGS

11. The goals of the Berkeley Cares program are: 1) to provide basic services to homeless individuals and families, including food, laundry, and public transportation, 2) to provide an alternative to giving cash to panhandlers, 3) to decrease the amount of money on the street that might be used for drugs and alcohol, and 4) to encourage more people to give to the homeless and homeless services.

The vouchers used in the Berkeley Cares program are of 25-cent denomination; a sheet of vouchers is \$3.00. They can be redeemed for food, clothing, sundries, laundry and bus fare, or fresh produce. They cannot be used to purchase alcohol, tobacco, or prescription drugs. The vouchers are sold on consignment at stores and agencies. They can be redeemed at delicatessens, restaurants, grocery stores, laundromats, produce markets, and homeless service agencies.

The program is operated as a private, nonprofit organization which has 250 businesses participating as voucher sellers, redeemers, and/or donation collection points in six commercial districts throughout Berkeley. Over 300,000 vouchers have been sold, and the redemption rate has increased to 90%.

12. The San Francisco program Castro Cares did not have a broad base of support which the Berkeley model defines. There must be enough participants to ensure that vouchers can be purchased and redeemed at a number of sites.

A list of cities which have voucher programs appears in the Appendix.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. Development of a voucher program should be explored for San Francisco. This might be done by having an Advisory Committee of the Mayor's Office acting with the Mayor's Budget Task Force request that

organizations such as the Council of District Merchants take leadership in exploring initiation of a voucher program.

12. Exploration of feasibility of a voucher program should include assurance that the program would have wide participation in the City both as to sellers and redeemer sites for the vouchers.

RESPONSE REQUIRED: The Mayor's Office within 60 days.

LIST OF NATIONAL VOUCHER PROGRAMS

Group: Caring Neighbors
Start date: August 1992
Contact: Amelia Canaday
Address: 509 10th Ave. East
Seattle, WA 98102
Phone: (206) 329-8601
FAX: (206) 329-6281

Group: Real Change for Spare Change
Start date: November 1992
Contact: Rob DeGraff
Address: 520 S.W. Yamhill St., Ste. 1000
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 224-8684

Group: Castro Cares
Start date: November 1992
Contact: Barry Hermanson
Address: 742 Fourteenth St.
San Francisco, CA 94114
Phone: (415) 255-9494

Group: Santa Cruz Cares
Start date: June 1993
Contact: Patricia Calvert
Address: P.O. Box 1384
Santa Cruz, CA 95061
Phone: (408) 429-8433

Group: Boulder Change
Start date: March 1993
Contact: Jonathan Ehrenkrantz or
Shelley Zimmerman
Address: 4645 N. Broadway
Boulder, CO 80304
Phone: (303) 442-4646

Group: Chicago Shares
Start date: January 1993
Contact: Ann Klocke
Address: 730 N. Wabash Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: (312) 787-8040

Group: Edmonton Cares
Start date: June 1993
Contact: Pat Murray
Address: Edmonton Police Service
9620 - 103A Avenue
Edmonton Alberta, Canada TSH OH7
Phone: (403) 421-2813

Group: New Haven Cares
Start Date: September 1993
Contact: Matt Lieberman
Address: 127 Wall Street
New Haven, CT 06511
Phone: (203) 432-4881

Group: Westside Cares
Start Date: December 1993
Contact: Laura Friedman
Address: 400 Riverside Dr., Apt. #4B
New York, NY 10025
Phone: (212) 666-5416

Group: Coupons, Inc.
Start Date:
Contact: Harry Main
Address: 1151 Mass Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 497-1595

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

Women and children who are homeless need separate attention and help in overcoming the problems and rising above homelessness.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

Homeless women and children are often the invisible members of the homeless population. Programs and attention center on the street-visible, disruptive, irritating, in-your-face victims of homelessness which may eclipse the need for programs designed to help homeless women and children. The needs of homeless women and children need to be dealt with more directly.

PROCEDURES

Members of the Civil Grand Jury met with representatives of the Commission on the Status of Women and the San Francisco Unified School District and visited sites of programs especially designed to aid homeless women and children: Lifeline (a private nonprofit organization), St. Anthony's (comprehensive program with separate projects, also private, nonprofit), and the Hamilton Family Center (a publicly-supported shelter). We also visited facilities listed as available to both men and women.

FINDINGS

13. Although there are exemplary programs designed to serve the needs of homeless women and children which are functioning well, the number of women and children served is small in comparison to the estimates of homeless women and children. The Fielding Institute report "Interesting Times: A Study of Housing and Homelessness" quotes the Lindblom study that 70% of homeless people are single males, but no figure is given for women. This is indication of the invisibility mentioned above. Estimates and counts of homeless people vary widely. Even the figures that are available usually do not give a separate count for women. Women (often with their children) are not seen as frequently on the street, at the ATM station, in shopping malls. Many homeless women are particularly vulnerable because an abusive relationship may have led to their homeless state. The need is for a protected shelter situation followed by transition programs leading to stable lives, a job, and permanent housing. The need for protection (anonymity) during all steps is essential; this fact separates the characteristic needs of women from the needs which motivate programs developed for men.

The work of the Commission on the Status of Women with homeless women needs to be integrated into programs developed by the various agencies working with the Continuum of Care.

14. The education of homeless children is sometimes lost in the planning

of various programs dealing with homelessness. The Central Office of the San Francisco Unified School District makes an effort to identify homeless children. The Central Office believes in flexibility in applying truancy regulations to these students. It is difficult to keep consistent records on children who must move around from shelters and temporary housing, and it is difficult to have these records available at the school the child may be attending for a brief time. Often the children are not enrolled in any school.

15. Educational needs include transportation, nutrition resources (breakfast and lunch), as well as money for school supplies; this is likely to become essential with the shift from federal funding to block grants and the cuts to such programs.
16. Homeless advocates indicate that the actions of individual schools or teachers may not reflect the flexibility recommended by the central office. There is concern that homeless children suffer from a stigma when the cause of their irregular attendance is identified as related to their homeless situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. Representation from the Commission on the Status of Women be integrated the work, plans, and proposals Continuum of Care. This integration should make more efficient use of resources for women's and children's programs. Prime consideration should be given to a safe haven from a batterer. Responsible child care must be provided during transition from job training programs employment and permanent housing.
14. A particular effort should be made to centralize information about services available for homeless children. This should include instructions about enrolling in or changing schools; immunization requirements and where the immunization may be obtained; availability of financial assistance with transportation, nutrition, and

school supplies. This information should be widely disseminated throughout the community -- not only to city departments which sponsor programs for the homeless but to the various projects which assist homeless people such as nonprofit projects, SRO hotels, shelters, church bulletin boards, laundromats, community bulletin boards, hotlines.

15. Procedures should be in place to ensure that money for transportation, nutrition, and school supplies is available for homeless children.
16. Particular care should be used in protecting the privacy of homeless children. Dissemination of information about procedures for enrolling, tracking records, and helping homeless children should be made widely available to all part of the school community through official District communications, PTA bulletins, in-service workshops, and parent meetings. Homeless or formerly homeless parents should be consulted in developing the materials.

RESPONSE REQUIRED: The Mayor's Office, The Board of Education, The Commission on the Status of Women, the Department of Social Services within sixty days.

Bibliography

Jencks, Christopher, **The Homeless**, Harvard University Press, 1994.

McElwee, Michael, "Interesting Times: A Study of Housing and Homelessness," The Fielding Institute, Santa Barbara, 1993.

Polaris Research and Development, San Francisco, "Survey of Emergency Shelters for Homeless Persons in San Francisco," 1993.